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# 'Austen's late-nineteenth-century afterlives: 1890s introductions to her novels'

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Women's Writing

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**Abstract:**

*This essay focuses on introductions to editions of Austen's texts published in the 1890s. By the late nineteenth century, Austen's popularity and status as an author of canonical texts was beyond doubt. While illustrations to the various competing editions have received critical attention in recent decades, the other main paratext, introductions, have largely gone unacknowledged, yet deserve attention both because of their cultural significance and in their own right as critical engagements with the novels. The introduction writers were men of some standing whose contributions added weight to Austen's texts. Their emphases on realism and humour in particular, as well as the predominant view of the author as a female genius whose art – especially her satire – had a masculine quality, but without ever seeing her as overstepping female boundaries, would have influenced many thousands of readers' engagement with Austen's texts.*

**Keywords:** Jane Austen, paratexts, reception, George Saintsbury, Reginald Brimley-Johnson, Austin Dobson.

**Austen's late-nineteenth-century afterlives: 1890s introductions to her novels**

This essay focuses on introductions to editions of Austen's texts published in the 1890s. The last decade of the nineteenth century was the first in which editions of classics routinely carried introductions and other editorial material. By the 1890s, Austen's popularity and status as a significant and canonical author was beyond doubt, as the various competing editions of her texts by different publishing houses testify to, as well as the care taken with the editions. The publishing houses who brought out editions of her novels that carried introductions in the 1890s were Macmillan, Allen, Dent, Gresham and Methuen. Apart from Methuen's, all editions that carry an introduction also include illustrations. Prices for editions with introductions range from 1s 6d to 6s, with the majority on first publication priced at 5s or 6s. After the fall of the three-decker in 1894, 6s was the usual price for new fiction. The inclusion of introduction and the illustrations to Austen's novels therefore justify these

editions of her text on a price level with new novels, which further emphasises the importance of these paratextual materials in the eyes of publishers, but also the readers who paid higher prices to obtain these editions rather than one of the much cheaper editions of Austen's texts available in the 1890s (several editions were available at 6d and even 3d).<sup>1</sup> While there were many more readers of sixpenny editions than of the six shilling editions, and print runs were larger the cheaper an edition became,<sup>2</sup> the fact that there were competing editions in the higher price range indicates that there was a significant demand for editions that offered introduction and illustrations as well as the text.

Whereas illustrations have received increased attention recently, introductions tend not to be mentioned. If at all, it is usually George Saintsbury who is commented on as the first to use the term *Janeite*, a term that, as Deidre Lynch points out, is "now used almost exclusively about and against *other* people",<sup>3</sup> which at times leads to critics ignoring analyses of Austen in the decade because they see it as "dominated by the 'Janeites'".<sup>4</sup> Most studies do not mention 1890s introduction writers, so that neither accounts of Austen criticism of the period, nor of the editions the introductions appear in, or of the illustrations published in the same editions as the introductions, discuss the interpretations of introduction writers.<sup>5</sup> The most extensive account is a seven-page discussion of 1890s editions by Brian Southam in his *Critical Heritage 1870-1940* that includes a brief discussion of some introduction writers.<sup>6</sup>

This essay argues that introduction writers' analyses are culturally significant, and that their points are worth engaging with. In the 1890s and beyond, the introductions were influential. They are more likely than other essays on a novel to reach general readers, constructing rather than just reflecting expected readership. Some of these editions sold very well: George Allen's de-luxe edition, with 160 illustrations by Hugh Thomson, and the introduction by Saintsbury, priced highly at 6s, had sold 11,605 copies in a year, and 25,000 copies by 1907.<sup>7</sup> Editions published in the 1890s that carried introductions are:

**Introduction by Reginald Brimley-Johnson**

NA, P, SS, MP, E, PP: all published by Dent in 1892, each with illustrations by William Cubitt Cooke. 5s.

**Introduction by George Saintsbury**

PP, published by George Allen in 1894, illustrated by Hugh Thomson. 6s.

**Introduction by Austin Dobson**

PP, Macmillan 1895, ill. Charles E. Brock.  
E, Macmillan 1896, illustrations Hugh Thomson.  
SS, Macmillan 1896, illustrations Hugh Thomson.  
NA & P, Macmillan 1897, illustrations Hugh Thomson.  
MP, Macmillan 1897, illustrations Hugh Thomson.  
All 3s6d - 5s.

**Introduction by Joseph Jacobs**

E, George Allen 1898, ill. Chris[tiana] Hammond.<sup>8</sup>  
SS, George Allen 1899, ill. Chris[tiana] Hammond.  
5 to 6s.

**Introduction by William Keith Leask**

PP, Gresham 1900, ill. Chris[tiana] Hammond.  
3s6d

**Introduction by Edward Verrall Lucas**

PP, Methuen 1900, Frontispiece F. D. Bedford.  
1s6d - 2s6d.

Brimley-Johnson, Dobson, Saintsbury and Lucas (possibly the others too), were reprinted in the 1890s and 1900s, at decreasing prices (2s to, occasionally, 6d), some well beyond the nineteenth century: Dobson's and Brimley-Johnson's introductions were still published in the 1950s, and one of Brimley-Johnson's even appeared in a Dent edition in 1978.<sup>9</sup> This essay explores the introductions written in the 1890s as paratexts that would have shaped many thousands of readers' encounters with Austen's texts.

*The introduction writers*

The introduction writers were men of some standing in literary and cultural circles in the 1890s; their names would have enhanced an edition's attractiveness and were in most cases as prominently displayed on the title page as the illustrator's (see e.g. figure 1).<sup>10</sup> Perhaps the best-known today is George Saintsbury (1845-1933), who was an eminent literary scholar, and, from 1895, Professor of rhetoric and English literature at the University of Edinburgh, as well as Fellow of the British Academy from 1911. He published books and essays, editions and anthologies, such as *Dryden* (1881), a *History of Elizabethan Literature* (1887), volumes of *Essays on English Literature* (1890, 1895), and many others.<sup>11</sup> As Andrew Maunday notes about Allen's editions of Austen's texts, "Allen's books were status symbols, indications of the consumer's taste and discernment".<sup>12</sup> Both Thomson's illustrations and Saintsbury's introduction to Austen's text would have contributed to this status.

Joseph Jacobs (1854-1916) was less eminent but still well known as a historian, mostly of Jewish history; a scientist and literary scholar who wrote essays on and edited texts by authors such as George Eliot, Matthew Arnold, Robert Browning, as well as Jane Austen.<sup>13</sup> Edward Verrall Lucas (1868-1938) was a journalist and biographer (including *Charles Lamb and the Lloyds*, 1898), as well as editor, and, most prominently, a satirist who worked for *Punch* for 30 years.<sup>14</sup> William Keith Leask (1857-1925) was lecturing classics at Aberdeen University and wrote books and essays as well as editing and introducing texts by a variety of authors including Walter Scott, Thomas Babington Macaulay, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Charles Dickens.<sup>15</sup> Reginald Brimley-Johnson (1867-1932) is possibly the most obscure of all introduction writers, although Southam claims that he “came to be regarded as the leading Austen expert until the arrival of R. W. Chapman in the 1920s”.<sup>16</sup> Brimley-Johnson’s 1892 collected edition represents a milestone in the history of Austen publishing in several ways, including, as David Gilson notes, being the first to contain “any editorial matter ... and to make any attempt at serious consideration of the text”.<sup>17</sup> Brimley-Johnson was a prolific editor, re-teller of stories, and provider of introductory material, on authors including Chaucer, Frederick Marryat, Fanny Burney, Walter Savage Landor, Robert Burns, Leigh Hunt, Hannah More.

**FIGURE 1.** Title page to *Mansfield Park* (Macmillan, 1897). Copy supplied by the British Library from its digital collections. © Public Domain.

Austin Dobson served the Board of Trade from 1856 to 1901, from 1884 as principal clerk of the marine department.<sup>18</sup> Among his colleagues at the Board were Cosmo Monkhouse and Edmund Gosse, both poets, writers and critics.<sup>19</sup> Dobson was a prolific writer and became a well-known poet, both in Britain and in North America. His critical writing focused on the eighteenth century: he wrote biographies of eighteenth-century figures including William Hogarth (1879), Henry Fielding (1883), Thomas Bewick (1884), Richard Steele (1886), Oliver Goldsmith (1888), Horace Walpole (1890), Samuel Richardson (1902), and Fanny Burney (1903), and numerous introductory essays to eighteenth-century texts and authors.<sup>20</sup> In 1874, he published the *Handbook of English Literature*, initially intended for Civil

Servants, which was several times reprinted over the ensuing decades, and included an entry on Austen (one paragraph emphasising the excellence of her characterisation in particular and praising her work as “a series of novels which (on her own ground) have not even yet been surpassed”<sup>21</sup>).

The level of an introduction writer’s involvement in an edition varied. Some, such as Brimley-Johnson, were editors of the texts as well, others, such as Saintsbury, provided the introduction but appear not to have been involved beyond that in the edition of the text they were introducing. Some archival material is extant that illuminates the relationship between introduction writer and publisher relating to Dobson and Macmillan.<sup>22</sup> Dobson provided the introductory material to several of Macmillan’s editions of eighteenth-century writers, including all six Austen novels when they were published between 1895 and 1897. Before turning to the introductions themselves, this essay focuses on Dobson as a case study to explore the relationship between publisher and introduction writer and the latter’s input into an edition.

#### *Austin Dobson and Macmillan’s Austen editions*

Over the course of his long writing career, Dobson dealt with a variety of publishers. Although no letters survive relating to the Macmillan Austen editions with Dobson’s introductions, extant letters preserved in the Macmillan archives, spanning several decades, show how the relationship between Macmillan and Dobson developed, and how highly the former valued the latter’s contributions to the firm’s editions of eighteenth-century texts. In 1869, Dobson, not at that point well-known, offered the company four of his poems, foregoing an honorarium in exchange for reserving copyrights.<sup>23</sup> As his literary standing increased and his relationship with Macmillan developed, he began to receive handsome payment for work published by the firm. In 1904, he agreed “to preface and annotate Mme D’Arblay’s *Diary*, as published by Colburn in 1842 – 6 for the sum of £200. ... I cannot anticipate that the annotation will be a very lengthy affair”.<sup>24</sup> £200 in the context of contemporary wages in the publishing sector was a considerable amount (especially for a piece of work not considered “a very length affair”); Percy Russell in his 1891 *Authors’ Manual* states that a novel “should return from £100 to £500”.<sup>25</sup> Remuneration for a novel could of course be much lower than that, as George Gissing’s *New Grub Street* (1891) reminds us and as William St Clair has noted (e.g. Conan Doyle receiving £30 for his first

Sherlock Holmes).<sup>26</sup> Proof readers would receive between 42 and 84 shillings weekly, engravers between 30 and 40 shillings weekly, press men and machine men between 20 and 35 shillings weekly.<sup>27</sup> The amounts Macmillan paid to Dobson therefore emphasise the added value and attraction that the firm believed Dobson's contributions, and Dobson's name, gave an edition of a text.

Dobson perceived his task as editor and preface writer to introduce and annotate an older text for readers of a different generation. His editions often included notes and indices as well as an introduction, and he took his task seriously: several of his letters refer to the research involved in preparing an edition, or recommendations as to who the best person might be to undertake the index. For example, Dobson explains why he "cannot conscientiously accept your attractive offer" of undertaking the writing of Richardson's life for Macmillan's *Men of Letters* series: "much as I should like the money, and apart from the fact that I have already promises to fulfil, my always-growing official duties make it practically impossible for me to enter upon any prolonged work" (1 Mar 1901). But Macmillan was clearly persuasive, because in 1902 Macmillan published *Richardson* by Austin Dobson. There are several letters that show Dobson declining offers Macmillan made, on the grounds of time, as he insists on researching his subject thoroughly (in the case of Richardson, he mentions in particular "six ponderous MS volumes of Richardson's correspondence at South Kensington, which I know have not been exhaustively examined" (1 March 1901)).

Dobson was involved in deciding which works would be published and what paratexts would be included. Regarding Fielding's works, he wrote to Macmillan in 1883:

I have been thinking a good deal about the Fielding matter, and have come to the conclusion that it would be inexpedient to print the plays and minor works, excepting perhaps the "Journal of a Voyage to Lisbon". But I do not see why the three novels and "Jonathan Wild", which still sell in cheap editions, should not be published, ... with notes at the end like those to Scott's novels. (8 May 1883)

His advice about paratexts is informed by his view of the marketability of texts. Scott had been annotated for decades, first by himself in the Magnum Opus edition of his works 1829-33, and later, particularly on the expiry of the copyright (1871-5), by several publishers who tried to compete in a crowded Scott marketplace.<sup>28</sup> Dobson was aware of the potential effects

annotations “like those to Scott’s novels” had on buyers and saw this as the way to market Fielding as similar to Scott in status.

Dobson’s letter goes on to outline the order of works and division into a number of volumes, and offer suggestions as to type and illustrations, and possible sources for paratexts, saying that “if autographs were required, [he has] no doubt [he] could get Locks to let us facsimile his last-seller”. For another volume, he suggests using images already in print, meticulously listing where they can be found, largely in other Macmillan publications but also some in texts published by other houses (15 Dec 1880). For the D’Arblay volumes, he specifies that “the type of the text should be large, and that of the notes (which should be in double columns) not too small.” He also sends a list of portraits, buildings, and autographs for inclusion, and makes clear that the index should be undertaken by Macmillan’s indexer (5 Jan 1904).

Dobson had considerable input into editions he was involved in. He also had control over the primary text. Although not described as an editor (the title page to the Burney diary describes his contribution as “preface and notes”<sup>29</sup>) he fulfilled that function, specifying when entering into the contract to “preface and annotate Mme D’Arblay’s Diary ... [that it should be] understood that I may omit passages and expressions, if any, I consider objectionable” (5 Jan 1904).

While no letters survive between Dobson and Macmillan regarding the Austen editions, letters relating to other editions show that he was concerned with the paratexts including the illustrations of volumes he was involved in. His exact involvement in the Austen illustrations is unclear, but Dobson and Thomson frequently collaborated and were good friends.<sup>30</sup>

Thomson had illustrated at least three of Dobson’s collections of poetry,<sup>31</sup> as well as several of the eighteenth-century novels that Dobson had written introductions to.<sup>32</sup> They communicated about editions they were both working on, and Thomson showed his friend his drawings, mentioning Dobson’s “delightful encouragement” several times in his letters.<sup>33</sup> In June 1890 he writes, “I have been meditating a descent on you with a bundle of Vicar drawings, ... [meaning] to ask your advice and suggestion”,<sup>34</sup> and later that year: “There is not another soul but one whose opinion is worth anything who cares to throw me a crumb of encouragement. ... I did not sleep for three or four hours last night after going to bed – for pleasure at what you said.”<sup>35</sup> Dobson’s opinion mattered a great deal to him. On *The Vicar of Wakefield*’s publication, Dobson wrote to Thomson:



I must congratulate you on your Vicar. [...] If it is not very popular, I shall be very much surprised; but in any case it is work of which you can never be ashamed – full of invention, fancy and clever characterisations, [...] and everywhere loyal to Goldsmith's text. How I wish he could have seen it!<sup>36</sup>

In the preface to his own *The Story of Rosina* (1895), Dobson writes that the success of his previous volume, *The Ballad of Beau Brocade* (1892), was “in the main attributable to [Thomson's] designs”, and that in *Rosina*, “Hugh Thomson has again afforded me the invaluable aid of his fertile fancy”.<sup>37</sup>

Given their friendship and frequent collaboration, it would appear likely that they also discussed editions of the five Austen novels they were both working on. Thomson had illustrated *Pride and Prejudice* for George Allen, to great acclaim, including more of Dobson's highly-valued approval: “You are at your best, the critics are shouting themselves hoarse in your praise”.<sup>38</sup> Dobson appears repeatedly to have given Thomson confidence, and to have exerted his influence as a critic to praise him publicly. Of the six Austen novels published by Macmillan and illustrated by Dobson, *Pride and Prejudice* was illustrated by Charles E. Brock (because Thomson had illustrated Allen's edition), but for the remaining five, Thomson returned to Macmillan and to collaboration with Dobson. They worked on the Austen illustrations for a period of two years, with *SS* and *MP* appearing in 1896 and *Emma*, *NA* and *P* in 1897.

Thomson's focus on the novels' humour has repeatedly been noted by critics, most notably perhaps in relation to Allen's edition of *Pride and Prejudice*.<sup>39</sup> His illustrations to other novels exhibit similar characteristics, of obvious humour, and of illustrating scenes that do not occur in the text, but are spoken about, in order to emphasise that humour. For example, he includes an image of Mrs Elton's brother's carriage-and-four, captioned “How my brother, Mr Suckling, sometimes flies about”,<sup>40</sup> emphasising the novel's humorous depiction of Mrs Elton's conceitedness. Similarly, in the text, Mr Knightley tells Emma when they discuss living arrangements for after their marriage, that he has given the matter “very long and calm consideration; he had been walking away from William Larkins the whole morning to have

this thoughts to himself”;<sup>41</sup> and it is this humorous moment that Thomson chooses to depict, with William Larkins and his horse watching their master depart with sad eyes:

**FIGURE 2.** “Walking away from William Larkins”, illustration by Hugh Thomson in: *Emma* (Macmillan, 1896), p.404. Copy supplied by the British Library from its digital collections © Public Domain.

Dobson, too, focuses on the novel’s humour as an important element. The only critical engagement with Dobson’s Austen interpretations to date, by Southam, brushes Dobson’s six introductions off in one sentence, claiming him to have had “an aversion to any kind of fact grubbing”.<sup>42</sup> Dobson was however an experienced critic who was well-known and respected. He also, as we have seen above, took his work very seriously and researched his topics, as well as collaborating with leading illustrators, writers and publishers of his time. Furthermore, as will be seen in the discussion below, Dobson and other introduction writers’ interpretations raise points that are relevant beyond their historical moment, many of which are familiar to twenty-first-century critics.

### *Introductions’ themes*

While there were of course differences between introduction writers’ analyses, some prominent common points of focus emerge, including humour, gender, biography, genius, characters, realism, scope.

*Humour and gender.* Irony and humour in Austen’s texts have now come to be among their best-known characteristics. However, when the novels were first published, reviews tended not to note the humour but focused instead on morality and realism, with irony first being discussed by the Shakespeare scholar Richard Simpson in 1870.<sup>43</sup> All 1890s introductions discuss her humour as an important characteristic. While Dobson and Brimley-Johnson emphasise it much less than Thomson does in his illustrations, both bring it into their discussions as a notable element. Dobson sees “the Collins and Bates and Jennings gallery [as being] admirably reinforced by Mrs Norris [who is] uniformly diverting” (*MP* xiii), while a

negative point about *NA* is that there is no equivalent of Mr Collins or Mrs Norris (*NA* xii). Similarly, Brimley-Johnson argues for humour as an integral part of the texts' attraction, with *Emma* including "a larger number than in any other novel, of supremely humorous character-parts" (*E* v). Where Dobson deems the humour not quite successful, as with Mr Woodhouse, he suggests that for 1890s readers, Mr Woodhouse needed some rectifying qualities to merit the attention he receives. As with other points of criticism however, Dobson excuses what could be seen as defects with a shift in the times. For example, he bemoans that there are "no servants as a source of humour" (*E* xiv) in Austen – which Thomson gives readers by providing the image of Larkins, for example – but sees the texts' confinement in terms of social class as a product of the author's times.

Most introduction writers at times struggle to reconcile the satire of her texts with Austen's gender. The only two who do not see the need to connect Austen's humour or satire with her gender are Dobson and Brimley-Johnson (who are also the only two to provide introductory essays for all six novels). For E.V. Lucas, her satire is the defining element. At the same time though, her gender defines her satire as it necessitates repression of her satirical urge in public texts. Austen "was always a satirist" (*NA* vii), and had mischievous impulses, as can be seen from her letters, which he quotes to show them written with "the same hand that wrote the novels, but it is ungloved" (*PP* xiii). In her public texts, she "subjected the satirical bent within her". The "spice of malice" therefore never occurred "without its rectifying smile" (Lucas, *PP* xii). Similarly, for Saintsbury, satire is a crucial component, which he feels has to be reconciled with her gender. Her humour gives her readers "the pleasant shocks, the delightful thrills, which are felt by the readers of Swift, of Fielding and we may here add, of Thackeray, as they are felt by the readers of no other English author of fiction outside of these four" (xix). He relates her to male authors, and sees her texts as exhibiting masculine qualities, comparing her cynicism and humour to Addison's:

In Jane Austen's genius there was, though nothing mannish, much that was masculine. ... And there is ... a certain not inhuman or unamiable cruelty, ... though a restrained and well-mannered, an insatiable and ruthless delight in roasting and cutting up a fool. ... I do not think at all the worse of her for it as a woman, while she was immensely better for it as an artist. (xiii-xiv)

For him, the masculine sharpness of her humour enhances her art. William Leask, whom Southam calls “thoughtful and un-Janeite”,<sup>44</sup> sees Austen’s satire bound up with gender too, but in very different ways:

If any little vein of satire is shown in her nature it appears to be reserved for designing spinsters like Miss Bingley, or old maids like Miss Bates, who are easily regarded by their creator as having come short of human felicity by their own unfitness for the higher life of marriage.<sup>45</sup>

In Leask’s view, where there is satire in her texts, it is directed at unsuccessful husband-hunting women. The fact that Austen herself did not marry, but “contentedly ... retired from the race, is little to the point” (xvi). Leask’s view is at odds with all other introduction writers’; while they at times class Miss Bates together with Mrs Bennet, Mr Woodhouse and Mr Collins, as humorous, “Miss Bates ... always commands our respect”. (B-J, *PP* xviii).

For Jacobs, too, discussion of her satire and sarcasm leads to points about gender. He cites a dialogue between Elinor Dashwood and Lucy Steele at length, inserting in brackets what he interprets each line to mean (as well as making the point also raised by many later critics, of how well Austen’s novels read as plays), to conclude “Irony and sarcasm are her chief weapons. No male novelist has gone as far as she in quiet sarcasm. There is even a hardness in the treatment of her female fools” (*SS*, xvii). Jacobs classes her sarcasm as going beyond that of male writers, which goes further than Saintsbury does, although, similar to Lucas who finds her capable of sharp satire but able to reign it in in public texts, Jacobs argues that the sharpest satire in *SS* is left over from an early draft. On the whole, his argument that her artistry is enhanced by “a sense of justice in Jane Austen which is essentially manly, if one may venture to say so” (Jacobs xviii), links his interpretation with Saintsbury’s: both see her highest achievements as masculine in tone and quality, and render associating Austen’s work with masculine artistry an accolade rather than detrimental to the author as a woman.

For 1890s introduction writers, humour is one of the defining elements of Austen’s texts. The extent to which her humour is seen as gentle or satirical however varies, as does the consequent need some introduction writers feel to reconcile her gender with her texts’ satire.

*Gender, Biography and Characters*. Austen's gender informs male introduction writers' discussions both of the author and of her texts. Biographical accounts tend to be based on Austen-Leigh's *Memoir*, with some writers following that interpretation and depicting her as "the reverse of the blue stocking, [who] generally was silent but we may be sure observant in company" (Leask, xi). Her heroines' lives and attitudes, such as Elizabeth's "strong family affection and domestic feeling" (B-J, *PP* vii) are viewed as "an absolutely faithful reflection of the author's own quiet existence", based on the conviction that "we can only know what Jane Austen really was by a sympathetic study of her work" (B-J, *PP* vii). The *Memoir* is not always followed and is even openly criticised at times, as when Dobson says that Austen-Leigh was a bit too careful "of his kinswoman's good name" (*PP* xi). Similarly, while on the whole depicting a rather conservative Austen, Brimley-Johnson opens up the possibility of Austen as a social reformer who might have been expressing, through Emma, "a more liberal attitude than could surely have been acceptable to her generation, upon 'the circumstances of Harriet's birth'." (BJ, *E*, vii), whereas Jacobs, while also seeing it as unconventional, blames the reference to "natural daughters ... in the presence of unmarried girls' on Austen's times, insisting this could not happen in "modern society" because of its greater sense of what is owed to virtue. (Jacobs, *SS*, xx). Both see the reference to Harriet as someone's natural daughter as daring material for a female writer (and female readers), but argue for different reasons, Brimley-Johnson giving her agency and potential political motivation, Jacobs by defending what may be perceived as unfeminine for a woman writer by blaming her times.

Austen's gender also influences introduction writers' assessments of how she viewed her writing. For most, her gender informs her artistry. They tend to see her as "unaware of conforming to any explicit theory of writing"; writing, to her, is "an agreeable pastime", because "ambition was practically unknown to her" (Lucas, *PP* xxi). In Lucas' view, she is not a professional writer because both the public, male, spheres of publishing and finance, as well as a theory of writing, are beyond her awareness. Dobson is closest to seeing her as a professional who consciously applied her skills. He focuses on Emma watching the High Street while waiting for Harriet (ch. 27), a passage he, like many twentieth- and twenty-first-century critics, quotes at length, to argue that this scene "is not only clearly seen, but touched in with the true economy of line", and consciously composed, in a language that testifies to the author having "lingered with patient and loving craftsmanship" over each sentence (Dobson, *PP* xxix). While this account is gendered too, in the patience and love for her work,

it is describing deliberate art. Leask, who is the most gender conservative of all 1890s introduction writers, also regards her as consciously composing, but in much more gendered terms. She may be “unlearned”, but she is “most fastidious”, taking great care over her writing:

Punctilious in the phrase and social tone, her literary quality is one of the simplest and most exquisite in the language, and is a perfect contrast to the slipshod and the vulgar work that inundates the fiction of today. (Leask, *PP* xiii)

She takes the kind of care of her writing that women might be expected to take in a public place, but in an unintellectual way.

Her gender also shapes the attitudes to her as an author. Most famously, it enables Saintsbury to self-confess as a “Janite”, seeing her as “the object of the personal affection” (xi), while Lucas, six years later, comments on Janeites in a less involved way, stating that “among English novelists she is the very darling”, and that

Everyone believes fondly that by no one else is she quite so thoroughly appreciated; we each can detect in her smooth pages a shade more of mischief, a thought more of insight, than our neighbour can. (*PP* xxv)

He describes the phenomenon that twenty-first-century critics have seen as the defining element of Janeitism; deprecating other readers’ engagement with Austen to stress the superiority of one’s own readings.

Austen’s gender also colours introduction writers’ interpretations of her characters. Similar to Saintsbury’s views of the author, as having masculine artistic qualities but nothing that was “mannish”, he reads Elizabeth Bennet as unexceptionable, and having “nothing of the ‘New Woman’ about her”, while being attracted to her for “being distinctly clever – almost strong-minded”. Dobson, too, emphasises Elizabeth’s being “intellectually engaging”, with an “admirable faculty for taking care of herself” (Dobson, *PP*, xxvi). Saintsbury, on the one hand, stresses “her being entirely destitute of ill-nature”, on the other, admires her for “a certain fearlessness [that is] very uncommon”, then concludes, famously, that “to live with

and to marry, ... [no nineteenth-century heroine] can come into competition with Elizabeth". Saintsbury's reading of both author and heroine is defined by their femininity; with both, he admires what he sees as masculine humour and courage, while at the same time being anxious to emphasise that neither Austen nor Elizabeth overstep gender boundaries. Generally, introduction writers admire the characterisation of Austen's women but alongside that is a repeated assertion that "her men are inferior to her women" (Leask, xix); Edward Ferrars wants "manliness" (Jacobs, *SS*, xiv), while Knightley may not have made "an ideal husband" (Dobson, *Emma*, xi).

Her artistry contains masculine qualities, even her hand writing was "more like a man's than that of woman" (Leask xi). The level of her genius is comparable to famous male writers, but introduction writers ensure that they represent the quality of Austen's genius as quintessentially feminine. These readings of her texts are largely defined by her gender. This is most obvious in discussions of her life and her as an author, but also in discussions of her female and male protagonists. With all the differences between introduction writers, attitudes to gender in particular show writers to interpret as part of their historical and cultural moment. None of them see her as akin to a New Woman; where masculine traits appear they are rendered acceptable by being linked to her artistry, not to her as a woman.

*Genius, realism, scope, and defects.* Introduction writers agree on regarding her as a genius, often in a gendered way, connected to her limited scope. While "she is [now] recognized as the first of female novelists" (Leask, v), her scope is limited. In that scope, she is perfect and on a level with Shakespeare, Scott or Fielding, who would not have "drawn a better Mr Collins, or a more lifelike Mrs Jennings" (Dobson, *PP*, xxiii); her writing can be described in "nothing but superlatives" (Lucas *PP*, xxiv). The introduction writers also provided essays on other authors' works, such as Fielding, Scott, Richardson, Swift, Thackeray, Shakespeare in particular, and draw links between their works and Austen's (eg Saintsbury, *PP*, Jacobs, *SS*, Dobson, *PP*), to say that in some respects she is like these writers, even if her scope is more limited (which sometimes leads to a verdict of "almost great enough for Fielding or for Swift himself" Saintsbury, *PP*, xvi).

Her realism is inferior to no one's. Her characters and plots are "delightful cut[s] from real life" (BJ, *Emma*, ix). Dobson sees the Eltons as "little masterpieces" because of their

“absolute fidelity to nature” (*E* xiii). As discussed above, for Dobson, Austen’s genius can perhaps most remarkably be seen in the scene where Emma observes the High Street. Like Dobson in using this scene, introduction writers indicate both her genius and its limited scope. Brimley-Johnson argues that her men are “always drawn frankly from a feminine standpoint. ... She is concerned with them as an element in the life of women – the chief element” (*PP*, xj), thereby commenting on the realism of the heroine’s point of view, as well as on the limited scope she has as a female writer concerned primarily with women. Conversely, Dobson criticizes Fanny Price for not being close enough to real life. She is

the result of a preconception – a fixed intention to create a model character of a certain type, than a study from the life. ... When [Edmund] and Fanny reflect and moralise, they are on the verge of “the discovery of the obvious”. (*MP*, xiii)

Dobson here sees realism subordinated to didacticism, similar perhaps to some twentieth- and twenty-first- century readers who have seen Fanny as the troublesome, moralistic heroine who is rarely anyone’s favourite. While introduction writers see Austen and her characters as complying with ideas of morality, in particular as regards gender boundaries, didacticism should not be overt, and certainly not dominate realism. Jacobs for example criticises *Sense and Sensibility* because he cannot quite acquit Austen of “the supreme crime” of didactic intention (x).

In most cases where introduction writers criticise, they see the reasons for the texts’ perceived defects as lying in Austen’s living and writing in a different era. Although Lydia’s elopement, for example, is seen as not fitting the story, “it was not out of keeping with some of Miss Austen’s eighteenth-century models, nor, indeed, with the manners of her day” (Dobson *PP* xxv). Similarly, Austen’s lack of a stronger “romantic paste” was caused by her living in the early nineteenth century (Saintsbury, xv), and her limited knowledge of history was in part due to its being drawn “from the old and untrustworthy versions of Hume and Robertson. Jane Austen was not at all accomplished in the modern sense” (Leask, ix). Mostly, writers blame Austen’s times for defects, implying a superior decade needing to make allowances for an inferior one. Dobson is an exception here in his more general recognition of the shifts in culture between the early and late nineteenth century without one being



necessarily superior: while he sees 1890s' values at odds with some elements of Austen's texts, in some cases, this is due to "our strenuous modern ideas" (*E* xiv).

### *Conclusion*

This essay has shown some of the ways in which Austen was read and regarded in the 1890s and beyond. Firstly, the fact that there were several competing editions in the 1890s that offered Austen's texts with introductory essays and illustrations indicates both popularity and status. Secondly, the introduction writers were men of some standing, adding weight to Austen's texts, but also, as the Dobson case study above has shown, potentially able to influence the text and paratexts of an edition beyond the introduction, therefore shaping readers' engagement with the texts in manifold ways. Thirdly, in terms of the analyses themselves, while there are differences between them, some common themes emerge. Introductions usually include some discussion of Austen's life, times, and the publication history of her novels, as well as the interpretative essay on the respective text, and therefore offer readers an introduction to text, context and author, in most cases working alongside illustrations to package the novels as early-nineteenth-century products, with the introduction writer and illustrator as cultural mediators. Introductions present the novels' author as a genius; significantly, a female genius, whose humour and realism are her defining characteristics, but who is limited in her scope, largely because of her gender and the consequent focus on women's lives. Introduction writers differ in their evaluation of her as a professional writer, conscious of her craftsmanship, though there is little discussion of literary technique. Writers agree however that in her artistry, and particularly her satire, she displays some masculine qualities, though ultimately, as a woman, she remains within female boundaries, even if some of her artistic qualities suggest masculine vigour. Compared to the early nineteenth century, where the most frequent criteria Austen's novels were judged by were moral instruction, amusement and realism (connected to limited scope), the most significant development is that for 1890s introduction writers, humour has emerged as a defining characteristic.<sup>46</sup> In terms of gender, while introduction writers allow for and even praise some unconventionality for both the author and her heroines, overall, they still see Austen and her characters as largely accepting of and well within gender boundaries, leaving this aspect for twentieth-century critics to explore as part of their cultural moment's engagement with Austen's texts.

- <sup>1</sup> Cheaper editions of Austen's texts were, for example, Routledge's 1s and their 6d edition, Dicks' illustrated *Pride and Prejudice* priced 6d, Blackie's editions of the novels for 1s4d/1s6d, White's for 6d and even 3d.
- <sup>2</sup> For example, print runs for Routledge's sixpenny edition of *PP* amounted to 20,000 from 1881-1901, compared to 7500 copies at 2s and 11,000 at 1s (A. Bautz, "In perfect volume form, Price Sixpence": Illustrating *Pride and Prejudice* for a late-Victorian mass-market," *Romantic Adaptations: Essays in Mediation and Remediation*, ed. C. Ruddell, C. Duffy, P. Howell (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013) 101-124.
- <sup>3</sup> Deidre Lynch, *Janeites: Austen's Disciples and Devotees* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 13.
- <sup>4</sup> Elizabeth Langland, "Pride and Prejudice: Jane Austen and her Readers," *A Companion to Jane Austen Studies*, ed. L. Lambdin and R. Lambdin (Conn.: Greenwood Press, 2000), 41-56 (44).
- <sup>5</sup> For example: Laura Carroll and John Wiltshire, "Jane Austen, Illustrated", *A Companion to Jane Austen*, ed. C. Johnson and C. Tuite (Oxford: Blackwell, 2009), 62-77; Katie Halsey, *Jane Austen and her Readers, 1786-1945* (London: Anthem, 2012), discusses Thomson's illustrations in Macmillan's edition (which also contained Dobson's introduction) but not Dobson and also generalises critics of the period as Janeites (179); similarly, Austin Dobson, who wrote introductions to all six Austen novels published by Macmillan, is not mentioned in collections that also consider historical criticism, such as *Jane Austen in Context*, ed. Janet Todd (Cambridge: CUP, 2005), Kathryn Sutherland's *Jane Austen's Textual Lives* (Oxford: OUP, 2005), (which mentions Saintsbury and Brimley Johnson but not Dobson); *A Companion to Jane Austen Studies*, ed. Lambdin and Lambdin (2000).
- <sup>6</sup> Brian Southam, *Jane Austen: The Critical Heritage 1870-1940*, vol 2, 59-65.
- <sup>7</sup> M. H. Spielman and W. Jerrold, *Hugh Thomson: his art, his letters, his humour and his charm* (London: Black, 1931), 91.
- <sup>8</sup> Christiana Hammond (1860-1900) was "the first identifiable female illustrator of Jane Austen's novels" (Looser, 62).
- <sup>9</sup> *Sense and sensibility*, introduction by R. Brimley Johnson (London: J. M. Dent & Sons), 1957; *Sanditon, The Watsons, Lady Susan, and other miscellanea*, Introduction by R. Brimley Johnson (London: Dent, 1978); *Pride and Prejudice*, (Macmillan: 1926), introduction by Austin Dobson; *Northanger Abbey and Persuasion*, Introduction by A. Dobson, illustrated, (London: Macmillan, 1931); *Pride and Prejudice; Mansfield Park*, (London: Macmillan and Co, 1938), with an introduction by Austin Dobson; *Sense and Sensibility*, Introduction by Austin Dobson, (London: Macmillan 1951).
- <sup>10</sup> Apart from Brimley-Johnson and W. K. Leask, the introduction writers are all included in the *ODNB*, which is another indicator of their significance.
- <sup>11</sup> Alan Bell, "George Edward Bateman Saintsbury", *ODNB* (<http://www.oxforddnb.com/>), accessed online 8 December 2017.
- <sup>12</sup> Andrew Maunder, "Making heritage and history: the 1894 illustrated *Pride and Prejudice*," *Nineteenth-Century Studies*, 20 (2006), 147-69 (151).
- <sup>13</sup> Anne Kershen, "Joseph Jacobs", *ODNB* (<http://www.oxforddnb.com/>), accessed online 8 December 2017.
- <sup>14</sup> E. V. Knox and Katharine Chubbuck, "Edward Verrall Lucas", *ODNB* (<http://www.oxforddnb.com/>), accessed online 8 December 2017.
- <sup>15</sup> P. J. Blaire, "William Keith Leask", *Aberdeen University Review*, xii (1925), 231-238.
- <sup>16</sup> Southam, *CH*, p.61.
- <sup>17</sup> David Gilson, "Later publishing history, with illustrations", *Jane Austen in Context*, ed. Janet Todd (Cambridge: CUP, 2005), 121-159 (138).
- <sup>18</sup> S. Gwynn, "Austin Dobson", *ODNB*, accessed 21 Sep 2017.
- <sup>19</sup> Alban Dobson, "Biographical Note," *Austin Dobson: an Anthology of Prose and Verse* (London & Toronto: Dent, 1922), vii-xii (viii).
- <sup>20</sup> Alban Dobson, p.xi.
- <sup>21</sup> Austin Dobson, *A Handbook of English Literature*, rev. edition (London: Crosby Lockwood, 1897), p.184.
- <sup>22</sup> Macmillan Archives, British Library, Add MS 55010.
- <sup>23</sup> Letter 9 March 1869. Unless otherwise stated, letters are cited from the manuscript held as part of the Macmillan Archives the British Library, Add MS 55010.
- <sup>24</sup> Dobson to Macmillan, 5 January 1904.
- <sup>25</sup> Percy Russell, *The Authors' Manual: a complete and practical guide to all branches of literary work* (London: Digby & Long, 1891), 212.

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- <sup>26</sup> William St Clair, "Following up the Reading Nation," *Cambridge History of the Book in Britain*, vol vi, 1830-1914, 724.
- <sup>27</sup> St Clair, "Following up", 723.
- <sup>28</sup> For example, A. & C. Black included notes by David Laing in their 1870-71 Centenary Edition, Wilson & Lochhead publicised their edition 1870-79 as edited by the Revd P. Hatley Waddell, etc. See Bautz, *The Reception of Jane Austen and Walter Scott*, pp. 82-3.
- <sup>29</sup> Diary and Letters of Madam D'Arblay, as edited by her niece Charlotte Barrett, with preface and notes by Austin Dobson, in six volumes. London: Macmillan and Co, 1905.
- <sup>30</sup> Spielmann and Jerrold, p.54.
- <sup>31</sup> *The Story of Rosina and other Verses*, London: Kegan Paul & Co, 1895, *The Ballad of Beau Brocade and Other Poems*, Kegan Paul & Co, 1892, *Coridon's Song and other verses*, with illustrations by Hugh Thomson and an introduction by Austin Dobson. Macmillan & Co 1894.
- <sup>32</sup> Eg, *Vicar of Wakefield*, Macmillan 1890, *Tales from Maria Edgeworth* (London: Wells Gardner, 1903), *Reade's Peg Woffington* (London: George Allen, 1899).
- <sup>33</sup> E.g. letter to Dobson June 1890, cited in Spielmann and Jerrold, p.54-5.
- <sup>34</sup> Cited in Spielmann and Jerrold, p.57
- <sup>35</sup> *ibid.*
- <sup>36</sup> Letter 11 Dec 1890, cited in Spielman and Jerrold, pp.57-8.
- <sup>37</sup> Austin Dobson, "Preface," *The Story of Rosina and Other Verses*, illustrated by Hugh Thomson (London: Kegan Paul, 1895), vii-viii.
- <sup>38</sup> Letter Oct 1894, cited in Spielmann and Jerrold, p.91.
- <sup>39</sup> See for example Devoney Looser, *The Making of Jane Austen* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 2017), p.53ff.
- <sup>40</sup> *Emma* (Macmillan, 1896), p. 275.
- <sup>41</sup> *Emma*, p. 403.
- <sup>42</sup> Southam, *Critical Heritage*, p.62.
- <sup>43</sup> Bautz, *Reception*, p.108. For an account of contemporary reviews: *ibid.*, pp. 15-46.
- <sup>44</sup> Southam, *CH*, p.64
- <sup>45</sup> William Keith Leask, "Introduction," *Pride and Prejudice* (London: Gresham, 1900), iii-xxi (xvi).
- <sup>46</sup> For a detailed discussion of early nineteenth-century reviews of Austen's novels, see Bautz, *The Reception of Jane Austen and Walter Scott* (London: Continuum, 2007), 15-23.